



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE WILL TEST PROJECT
TO FUND NEEDED IMPROVEMENTS FOR VISITOR SERVICES
ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES**

More spotting scopes, accessible fishing facilities, nature trails, and other visitor services will be available soon at up to 41 national wildlife refuges and 1 national fish hatchery. Funds for the improvements will come from new or modified recreational fees collected at the sites under a test demonstration program announced today by Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt.

By this spring, local residents and frequent visitors to 15 of the most popular national wildlife refuges will be able to buy an annual pass to each of the refuges for between \$10 and \$15. The annual passes are part of a recreation fee demonstration program mandated by Congress. The program is designed to raise additional funds to improve recreation services and help make infrastructure repairs on selected public lands, including national parks and Bureau of Land Management sites.

"These fees will be used to improve the visitor experience at the sites at which they are collected and will be targeted for much-needed repairs and improvements that have been delayed because of budget shortfalls," Babbitt said. "Our highest priority as we implement the test fee demonstration program is to encourage public participation and support to maintain healthy, thriving, and accessible public lands."

Currently, recreation fees are collected at 65 national wildlife refuges, with 70 percent of the funds dedicated for land acquisition. The remaining 30 percent, which goes to the collecting refuge, falls short of covering the cost of collection. The test fee demonstration project allows the collecting refuges to keep at least 80 percent of the new fees on site while up to 20 percent may be used for other refuges in the most need.

Congress authorized up to 100 refuge sites to test new entrance and user fees in the 3-year demonstration project. At this time, 41 refuges and 1 fish hatchery have tentatively been identified to participate on a phased-in basis beginning this fall. Eighteen of those 41 refuges currently charge fees. Additional refuges may be added as further evaluation, including outreach with local residents and community leaders, is completed.

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The test sites were selected because they have high visitation, have limited access points at which fees can be collected, and offer some visitor services. All but about 100 of the 511 national wildlife refuges are open to the public but fee collection is not feasible at most because they have multiple access points. Others are in remote locations with uneven or little visitation.

The Duck Stamp (Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp) will continue to be accepted as an annual pass to all national wildlife refuges and the proceeds will continue to be used to acquire wetlands. Similarly, the Golden Age, Golden Eagle, and Golden Access passes will continue to be accepted for entrance into refuges, national parks, and Bureau of Land Management sites.

The estimated annual cost to administer recreational programs on national wildlife refuges is approximately \$22.4 million, representing about 4.9 percent of the refuge system operating budget. The new recreation fees are estimated to add about \$700,000 to the current fee program, which generates approximately \$2.5 million annually.

A state-by-state listing of the refuges participating in the new recreational entrance and user fee program is attached. Additional information about specific refuges can be obtained by contacting the local refuge manager.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency with responsibility for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 511 national wildlife refuges and 72 national fish hatcheries.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's most outstanding network of lands and waters dedicated to wildlife conservation. Its 511 units, at least one in every state, and waterfowl production areas encompass 92.3 million acres of important wildlife habitat.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, stocks recreational fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Recreation Fee Demonstration Program
Tentative Sites, Dates, and Planned Use of Revenue

- * (Phase 1) fall 1996
- ** (Phase 2) winter 1997
- *** (Phase 3) spring - thru 1997

A. New Entrance Fees.

- Arizona** ** Buenos Aires NWR. Watchable wildlife projects from entrance fee (\$2/person, \$4/car), also user fees for interpretive tours and group tours (\$20-\$50/group), and rental fees.
- California** *** Sacramento NWR. Improve auto tour route from refuge-specific annual pass (\$10/person) and entrance fee during birding months (\$3/car, \$15-\$25/group).
- Hawaii** ** Kilauea Point NWR. Improve interpretation, education, volunteer coordination, trails, and other public facilities, and increase law enforcement for visitor safety and resource protection from honor entrance fee (\$2/person) and resident annual pass (\$10/person).
- New York** ** Target Rock NWR. Install interpretive signs on trail from reactivated entrance fee (\$2/person, \$4/car).
- *** E.A. Morton NWR. Seasonal interpretive specialist for improved visitor services from new self-issue entrance fee (\$2/person, \$4/car).
- North Dakota** *** Sullys Hill National Game Preserve. Improve environmental education programs and interpretive information from entrance fee (\$2/person, \$5/group).
- South Dakota** *** Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery. Restore aquaria and support equipment, improve interpretive exhibits from entrance to aquarium (25 cents/person).
- Texas** * Aransas NWR. Visitor services staff for improved visitor programs from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and entrance fee (\$2/person, \$4/car, \$25/group).
- Midway** *** Midway Atoll NWR. Enhance interpretation and education from access/landing fee (\$5/person).

B. Modified Existing Entrance Fees:

- Arkansas** ** Holla Bend NWR. Improve interpretive facilities and signs from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- Delaware** ** Bombay Hook NWR. Improve maintenance of auto tour route from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- Florida** ** St. Marks NWR. Improve visitor facilities and service from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- ** Hobe Sound NWR. Improve visitor facilities, renovate visitor center from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- ** ARM Loxahatchee NWR. Improve visitor facilities from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- ** J.N. "Ding" Darling NWR. Renovate visitor center from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- Georgia** ** Okefenokee NWR. Improve visitor facilities, renovate boardwalk trail from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- Iowa** *** DeSoto NWR. Improve auto tour route interpretive signs, provide informational leaflets, maintain visitor facilities from refuge-specific annual pass (\$15/person) and existing entrance fee.
- Maryland** ** Blackwater NWR. Improve interpretive signs from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- Massachusetts** ** Parker River NWR. Improve visitor facilities and programs from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- Missouri** *** Mingo NWR. Provide informational leaflets, improve auto tour route interpretive signs, maintain visitor facilities from refuge-specific annual pass (\$15/person) and existing entrance fee.
- New Jersey** ** E.B. Forsythe NWR. Improve trail and tour route maintenance from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.

- New Mexico** * Bosque del Apache NWR. Improve visitor facilities and services from new fee schedule (increase from \$2 to \$3/person; refuge-specific annual pass: \$12/person).
- Virginia** ** Back Bay NWR. Improve visitor center exhibits from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- ** Chincoteague NWR. Upgrade interpretive exhibits from refuge-specific annual pass (\$12/person) and existing entrance fee.
- Washington** *** Dungeness NWR. Provide viewing scopes for overlook, improve hiking and access trails, signs from refuge-specific annual pass (\$10/person) and new fee schedule (increase from \$2 to \$3/person).
- *** Nisqually NWR. Develop environmental education program from new fee schedule (increase from \$2 to \$3/person), new annual pass (\$10/person).

C. New User Fees:

- Delaware** *** Prime Hook NWR. Provide interpretive signs from fishing/canoeing access (\$1/person).
- Idaho** *** Deer Flat NWR. Provide information kiosk at boat launch site from special youth activities building fee (\$35/group), honor boat launch fee pending county concurrence (\$3/boat).
- Illinois** * Crab Orchard NWR. Repair and improve 50 boat docks, renovate boat ramps from boat marina dock rental, launch, campgrounds, fishing tournaments, deposit concession revenue into demonstration project, deer hunt fee (\$5/person, fall 1996).
- Iowa** * Union Slough NWR. Improve wildlife habitat from deer hunt fee (\$10/person).
- Kansas** *** Quivira NWR. Great Plains Nature Center. Improve interpretive exhibits, provide additional interpretive staff, environmental education materials and support from fee for individual programs (\$2/person), interpretive programs, special events (\$10/group).

- Maine** * Rachel Carson NWR. Provide maps, leaflets, signs, increased law enforcement for visitor safety and resource protection from hunt fees (10/person).
- Minnesota** ** Minnesota Valley NWR. Provide accessible fishing facility from meeting room fee (\$50/group).
- Montana** * National Bison Range. Improve visitor services, accessibility, environmental education programs, interpretive trails, and materials from two auto tour route fees (\$4/car), special event fee and teacher workshop fee (\$20/group), refuge-specific annual pass (\$10/person).
- Nebraska** ** Ft. Niobrara NWR. Improve visitor programs and materials, facility maintenance at launch area, increased law enforcement for visitor safety, and resource protection from access fee for canoeing and tubing on the Niobrara River (\$3/person).
- New Hampshire** * Great Bay NWR. Provide maps, brochures, signs from deer hunt fee (\$20/person).
- New Mexico** * Bosque del Apache NWR. Improve visitor facilities and services from interpretive tour fees (\$25/group).
- Oklahoma** * Deep Fork NWR. Improve visitor facilities from deer hunt fee (\$20/person).
- * Sequoyah NWR. Repair visitor facilities from white-tailed deer hunt fee (\$20/person).
- Ohio** *** Ottawa NWR. Purchase water-pumping facility from deer hunt fee (\$10/person).
- Washington** ** Columbia NWR. Improve restroom facility, install boat ramp from honor camping fee at Soda Lakes (\$5/site).
- *** Willapa NWR. Install interpretive signs from honor boat launching fees (\$2-\$3/boat).

D. Modified Existing User Fees:

- Maryland** * Eastern Neck NWR. Install informational signs, operate hunter check station from deer hunt fee (changed from \$10 permit fee to \$10 application fee).